

Media and Diversity in Post-Conflict Countries

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Despite a legal framework that guarantees freedom of speech and respect for minorities, the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. This is particularly in the case of television news, a medium which represents the main source of information about other Mediterranean cultures. Eldar Sarajlić explores the influence and impact of politics on the media sector, current trends in cross-cultural reporting, and the potential of new media formats to promote cultural diversity at the national level.

The media landscape in Bosnia and Herzegovina is sharply divided along ethnic lines, both in terms of editorial policies and audience. Putting aside several exceptions in the electronic and print domain, most of the radio and television channels, daily newspapers and magazines follow strict ethno-political allegiances and communicate to particular ethnic interests. The media sphere in the country can be clearly taken as an indicator of the existing social and political rifts, due to the fact that in most cases it clearly reflects all dimensions of ethnic politics. At the same time, however, it is the media domain which strengthens many of these rifts, through discursive processes of defining, promoting and sustaining issues which are prone to systemic production of social and political conflict. Moreover, the media on occasions play a leading role in terms of creating divisions and conflicts, acting as a dominant political influence and shunning formal institutions and organisations.

The Legal Framework and Contemporary Media Context

Taking into consideration the highly sensitive role of media in transitional post-conflict countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, legal regulation of the media sector is of great significance. Indeed, within Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are several laws, codes and institutions that determine the rules of the media game, including the 'freedom of speech', a basic rule for any media system which is guaranteed by the country's Constitution and is in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the European Convention of Human Rights and further defined in the Law on Communications and Law on Freedom of Access to Information.

In addition, access to information, freedom of expression and freedom from interference are ensured by the Broadcasting Code of Conduct, defined by the Communications Regulatory Agency (CRA), a state body in charge of regulation of the country's communication sector. Laws at a lower political level also provide guarantees for press

freedom, such as the Law on Public Information and Law on Media in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Law on Public Information and Law on Protection from Defamation in Republic of Srpska. Formal independence of electronic media is protected through the establishment of the state regulatory agency, the CRA.

There are, however, many reports that indicate a significant level of direct interference of politics in the work of the media sector, principally through economic and financial means as well as through the assurance of self-censorship. On the other hand, there is no legal regulation of the print media, and instead 'ethical principles' have been established through the Press Code, a document produced by the Press Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is a non-governmental association of journalists without the power to impose sanctions on the media.

Relative to the size of its population, the media scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina is significantly large, with the CRA public register recording in 2009 a total of 45 television stations, 144 radio stations and 6 public broadcasting stations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country which has less than four million inhabitants. The print media market is also huge, with eight daily newspapers and almost 50 weekly and biweekly publications, produced on a more or less regular basis. With regards to the the Public Broadcasting System in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the structure consists of several different parts, in which there are three main radio-television broadcasters: the BHRT (the joint state-level channel), the RTRS (the Republic of Srpska radio-television, a Serb controlled broadcaster) and the FTV (Federal Television, the Bosniak-Croat dominated broadcaster). The public space is divided in three, clearly defined parts in which ethnic media play a dominant role. Some exceptions to this rule can be found in print media, mainly weekly magazines such as BH Dani, Slobodna Bosna and the daily paper Oslobođenje, as well as in some elements of the public broadcasting system, although, in general terms, an

ethnically divided public sphere is much more a rule than an exception.

Diversity and Difference: Mediterranean 'Otherness' in the Media Mirror

Different groups of media are controlled by different ethnic agendas through which all information and production is filtered. Ethnic allegiance, which does not necessarily need to be explicit in the media name (though there are many television and radio stations and print journals with explicit ethnic labels) serves as a key ideological reference point for all media content, including the presentation of 'otherness' and cultural diversity in the Mediterranean. At the same time, however, normatively speaking, Bosnian media (that-is-to-say public broadcasters at the very least) are obliged to respect cultural diversity and provide media space for its presentation. The Constitution of the country, set out in the Article 2, guarantees all individual and cultural rights to its citizens, and, in addition, the Law on Protection of Minority Rights stipulates that public broadcasters must provide space for the public expression of minority cultures. Taking this into consideration, there is therefore a level of normative standard ground upon which a broader and general attitude towards cultural diversity could be founded. Although no law prescribes how foreign cultures are to be presented, a number of ethical principles could be drawn from these documents, as well as from their formal accordance with European and global standards of respect for cultural diversity. Nevertheless, the statistical data gathered through the Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll during the second half of 2009 appears to indicate that the type of media contents that would bring a positive change to mass perception of the peoples and cultures across the Mediterranean region are predominantly rare in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with only a quarter (25.9%) of the total respondents saying that they recalled such media contents on cultural diversity matters.

The majority of information regarding cultural diversity in the Region comes from the media content that is most prone to political influence: the news. Having to cope with transitional

problems pertaining to economic, financial and ownership struggles, Bosnian media has been very poor in terms of developing educational media, documentary and similar formats. Most of the television schemes and print journal contents are reserved for overtly political themes or news that determines the entire media agenda. This is evident by the indicators of the Poll related to the main sources of information regarding the peoples and cultures on the shores of Mediterranean, which is in most cases news outlets (around 64% of respondents highlighted news as a source of positive information on other cultures, while only 27% said it was documentary films). The data sets out another interesting finding outlined earlier about the traditional oral nature of Balkan cultures, the evidence that it is television media that determines the perceptions of the public much more than any other media source: news from the print sources are highlighted by only 19% of respondents in comparison with 64% of the television media. Books as a source of knowledge of 'others' are almost at the very end of the spectrum, with only 9% of people stating they had read about other Mediterranean cultures positively in books. Blogs and the internet seem to have a completely irrelevant role in transferring positive knowledge about the cultural diversity of the Mediterranean: 0.5% and 9% of respondents respectively have gained positive impressions on cultural diversity online. This finding says much more about the communication channels and perception patterns of the Bosnian population than about the inherent inclination of each of these media sources towards cultural diversity.

The most striking aspect revealed here is that those sources that transfer the most of the knowledge about the 'others' tend to have a negative influence on the image of other cultures, with more than 80% of the respondents in Bosnia not mentioning news programmes on television as a source of positive information about Mediterranean cultures at all. The representation of cultural difference, pertaining to other peoples and cultural groups, takes place on a level of framing rather than in terms of direct portrayal of assumed negative characteristics. Members of other cultural groups, for example, are rarely taken as serious and reliable sources of information, and, on some occasions, the 'others' are even

Bosnia and Herzegovina - Media Centre Sarajevo

Founded in 1995 by the Open Society Fund, the Media Centre Sarajevo is an organization supporting development of a professional and independent journalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was created to assist democratization of Bosnian society through development of a balanced media content, a task which was especially important given the crucial role of the media in ethnic mobilization and conflict in the Region. The Media Centre conducts training of journalists, prepares various publications and produces media content. The most significant contribution to a better cross-cultural understanding is done through some of its research activities aimed at deepening the knowledge on various issues present in media on daily basis. The research reports, such as ones on media discourse and ethnic conflict, social exclusion or public broadcasters in divided societies help to understand how media aggravates or mollifies the propitiousness for social and cultural conflicts in a country such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and, in this way, provides a basis for creation of inclusive media policies.

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explicitly labeled as undesirable referees of certain disputes. In general, individuals and groups coming from other cultures are seldom framed in contexts that would be equal with the local culture and its values, and cultural difference therefore serves as a framing tool for conveying implicit messages about the non-comparability of moral, social and political values of 'others' with the ones shared by the local population. Due to the particular nature of ethno-cultural differences among the Bosnian population, this trait in most cases is religion, and therefore portrayals and presentations of other Mediterranean cultures and peoples also depend on the religious dimension of the particular ethnic ideology that exerts its influence over the particular media. Media influenced by Bosnian Muslim ethnic ideology, for example, will portray Turkish culture in an absolutely positive way; ethnic Serb media will do the same with the Greek culture, while framing Turkish or Arab culture through an implicit negative guise; and Croat dominated media will frame Italian culture positively and implicitly misrepresent non-Catholic Mediterranean cultures and peoples. In all cases, representation of other Mediterranean cultures will occur in a densely filtered context, and in accordance with values and norms established by the dominating ethnic politics.

Investing in Cross-Cultural Documentary Programmes

As concluding remarks for this article, we can say that there is an intricate mutual relation between the media, politics and diversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This reality results in a particular ethnic constitution of the Bosnian public domain, with three distinct public and media spheres created in the process. These spheres serve as filters of all areas of media content, including information about Euro-Mediterranean cultures and peoples.

Television media has the most significant influence over the Bosnian population, and hence represents the strongest agent in terms of providing information on diversity issues. The results of the Anna-Lindh/Gallup Poll suggests, however, that television is only rarely a source of positive information about other cultures, despite being one of the most influential

media, and one of the reasons for this might be the fact that most information about Mediterranean cultures and peoples is presented through news sections and shows which are exposed to political influence and as such distorted along the dominant ethnic and cultural rifts in the country.

At the same time, the data also indicates a factor that may chart a way forward for the institutions and organisations concerned with cultural cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. As highlighted in the Poll, documentary programmes aired on television are rarely mentioned as a source for positive information on cultural diversity (only 27% of respondents said they have received positive information on other cultures through documentary films), and yet given the nature of such programmes and their artistic potential to detach from day-to-day politics that affects other media features, they might be used as reliable, and at the same time perception-changing and cross-generational media tools for advancing and sustaining positive views of cultural diversity.

The most significant structural constraint in this regard is of a financial nature. Amidst constant financial struggles, exacerbated by the current global economic crisis, Bosnian media bodies are reluctant to invest in documentary films and similar features, especially those related to cultures and peoples in the Mediterranean space. As a consequence, the development of cooperation programmes across national boundaries aimed at advancing documentary films and features might have a positive influence over the Region and contribute to the breaking of ethnic affiliations many of these countries are trapped in. It would be particularly important to target young people with such cooperation programmes and documentary features, and to try to develop a new sense of Euro-Mediterranean belonging, free of cultural exclusion and ethnic prejudice.

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Tahqiq Sahafi - Investigative Reporting

'Tahqiq Sahafi' is an original experience of comparative journalism involving young media practitioners from Algeria, Egypt, France, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestine, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey. Initiated in 2009 with grant support of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the aim of the project has been to support the production of alternative and independent sources of information on culturally sensitive issues that are of common concern for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation including 'immigration' and the 'challenges facing youth communities'. During the first phase of the initiative, twelve young journalists, with guidance from senior practitioners, developed over eighty articles on the themes of 'Portrait of a Generation' and 'War and Peace: Young people face their future'. This first series of work became a source of debate with over 15,000 users logging into the published articles via the website of Babelmed who hosts and coordinates the initiative, and in this way 'Tahqiq Sahafi' also aims to stimulate discussion on issues which often receive limited coverage in the mainstream media.

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